

February 28, 2017

To: Senator Casperson, and members of the Committee on Transportation
From: Marsha Buehler, Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route Committee
RE: SB 176, to amend PA 299 of 1996

I am writing as chairman of the Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route Committee, (a Pure Michigan Byway). The Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route was officially designated a Michigan Scenic Heritage Route by the Michigan State Legislature in 2002, and a Pure Michigan Byway in 2015.

The Pure Michigan Byways Committees are composed of volunteers who dedicate time, energy, and resources to serve the mission and goals of their Byways corridor management plans. The committees are valuable conduits of information between the Michigan Department of Transportation, the organizations, the units of government and organizations they represent, and the general public.

PLEASE NOTE: We use the term "sign" to mean each personalized text strip or "logo" that is placed on the larger TOD sign posts, which accommodate more than one individual business sign. These individual text strips are sometimes referred to as "logos", that are placed on the larger "signs".

In reference to SB 176, which seeks to amend PA 299 of 1996. The language reads, with proposed language in bold: (ii) Not visible from the rural road for which the tourist oriented directional sign is sought **unless a sign for an eligible attraction is already in place in the vicinity for which the tourist-oriented directional sign is sought.**"

We propose the following language be substituted in SB 176. The explanation is below.

(ii) Not visible, **including any signage already in place**, from the rural road for which the tourist oriented directional sign is sought.

Here are our questions and explanation for our position:

Does the term "sign for an eligible attraction" refer to a tourist-oriented directional sign, or to any type of sign advertising the attraction, such as a sign erected on private property?

The proposed language is confusing. Does it mean that:

1: If the otherwise-qualifying business, not itself visible from the road, has a sign visible from the road, the business does not therefore qualify to have a tourist-oriented directional sign?

Or does it mean that:

2. It doesn't matter if the business itself doesn't qualify for a sign (because it is visible from the road or other listed reason), if a qualifying business has a sign, then any other non-qualifying businesses can also have a sign or signs? Does that "sign" for the qualifying business need to be a tourist-oriented directional sign, or does any sign whatsoever count?

Or does it mean that:

3. If a TOD sign for the non-qualifying business has been placed, that sign may stay in place?

In this case, we propose this language be substituted:

(ii) Not visible from the rural road for which the tourist oriented directional sign is sought. **If a sign for a non-eligible attraction is already in place, it may remain only until its current contract/paid**

period expires.

If the intention is the first, then our committee wholeheartedly endorses the SB 176 amendment as written, but suggests our proposed language for clarification.

If the intention is the second, our committee vehemently opposes SB 176.

For several years, The Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route Committee has been working with other Pure Michigan Byway Committees and with MDOT to require that the Tourist -Oriented Directional Sign provider (Michigan Logos, Inc.) follow the letter of the law as to qualifying businesses along our routes. There is rapid proliferation of signs along our routes, and that proliferation is degrading the scenic character of the routes. Unfortunately, the directional aspect of the TOD sign program is being overlooked, and the TOD signs are becoming inexpensive advertising signs- not directional signs intended to improve safety. Many of the businesses which have recently acquired signs from Michigan Logos, Inc. are actually located on and highly visible from the road, in our case M-22, M-204, and M-109. Some businesses along the route have multiple signs, alerting motorists to their attraction 3 miles ahead, and so forth.

If the intention is the third, our committee accepts a reasonable compromise, to grandfather currently existing TOD signs for non-qualifying businesses for the time period of their current paid agreement with Michigan Logos, Inc. with the understanding that additional signs (or "logos"), for those, or any other non-qualifying businesses, will not be erected.

By allowing businesses, that do not qualify on their own, to have signs merely because a qualifying business has one, negates the whole point of having tourist oriented directional signage. Tourists and others using the road benefit by visible signage safely directing those unfamiliar with the area to an attraction that cannot be seen from the main road. This TOD signage helps to eliminate driver confusion.

Tourists do not need a sign erected in the road right of way to direct them to a business that is easily seen and accessed from the road. This is visual clutter and state sponsored advertising. There is nothing directional about this signage.

No entity is permitted to place advertising signs in the road right-of way; yet TOD signs erected for non-qualifying businesses are exactly that: advertising signs, erected in state road right of way, with engineering and placement study costs borne by MDOT directly, and therefore by Michigan taxpayers. The State of Michigan derives no income from TOD sign sales and placement.

Thank you for you attention. We hope that you will accept our position, and either decline SB 176, or amend it to address our concerns about proliferation of non-qualifying signage.

Marsha Buehler buehlerm@earthlink.net 4100 N Omena Point Road, Omena 49674
Chairman, Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route Committee